

A

LETTER OF INQUIRY

TO

MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL

OR

ALL DENOMINATIONS,

ON

SLAVERY.

BY

A NORTHERN PRESBYTER.

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L E T T E R .

A MINISTER of New England humbly addresses this letter to his brethren, of all denominations, on slavery, In view of the excitements of these difficult times, he feels impelled to suggest a few inquiries, concerning this principal source of difficulty, to their attentive consideration. He chooses not to multiply words, but to propose, briefly and simply, the search after elementary principles, which, in his judgment, are too much overlooked amidst the flurries of occasional events. He is deeply impressed by the growing importance of such elementary inquiry to good men, while these fitful and portentous blasts thicken, as they are likely to do, into a destructive storm.

I. Whether it does not especially concern ministers of the Gospel to consider the question of slavery from its origin and foundations, as a question of Divine right, rather than of prudence, policy, or economy — a question of the moral sense and judgments, rather than of the sensibilities and sympathies — of the

divinities, rather than the *humanities*? Whether there is not danger of exaggerating the accidents and contingents of slavery, which occasion numerous and irreconcilable diversities of opinion among wise men, and are of little comparative importance, above its principle, which, as right or wrong, is essential, and a matter of faith? Whether there can be any end of existing confusions, false issues, or disastrous controversies on the subject, unless these distinctions are properly understood and rigidly observed, according to their natural order and relative importance? Whether the accredited guides of society, in respect to morals and religion, should not, as much as possible, as things now are, withdraw the public mind from the disagreeable attitudes and ungracious political movements of slavery, to its providential design, and its comprehensive relations and bearings in respect to the moral government of God? Whether, if they can find, in this respect, a common basis of judgment concerning the institution itself, the moral and political difficulties attending the use and administration of it, may not be overcome, or alleviated, so that good men may be delivered from false positions, and the nation at large from jeopardy?

II. Whether slavery is not an institution of God according to *Natural Religion*? That is—whether mankind, being evidently and historically wicked, in all ages and generations, hateful and hating one

another, it may not be, in the nature of the case, impossible that individuals, nations, or races, as they naturally increase in wickedness, become more insensible to right and wrong, and consequently reckless and incapable, should not decline into more absolute barbarism, licentiousness, and crime, or that they should even subsist, with any safety to themselves, or the less degenerate and more deserving portions of mankind, without imprisonment, servitude, or other similar disability? Whether wickedness is not as naturally characteristic of the degraded as of the more cultivated portions of the world, and an original cause of their degradation as really as it is the cause of the oppression and cruelty of their superiors? Whether, therefore, slavery may not only be consistent with the perfections of God, as the universal, providential, and moral governor, but absolutely required by them for the best, if not the only possible ordering of the refractory world, in reference to its continuance in a probationary state? Whether the justice of God might not require it, in evidence of his righteous displeasure against sin? Whether his goodness might not require it for the necessary restraint of sin, and the limiting of its naturally injurious effects; or in providing better or more tolerable conditions for peculiarly depraved and imbecile men, than they could possibly enjoy in an unrestrained or undisciplined state; or in arresting their otherwise certain and ruinous en-

croachment upon better, or, at least, more favored classes of mankind; or in putting these more favored classes in a higher capacity, and on their better behavior? Whether slavery, thus, notwithstanding its necessary inconveniences and ills, is not a truly reformatory institution in general; and, whether, notwithstanding the unnecessary evils which ordinarily attend it from the bad passions of its proper administrators, it is not, on the whole, better for the world, the world being what it is, than would be the absence of it; and, whether, if it were carried on more agreeably to its natural design, it would not be more rapidly conducive to a state of order, submission, intelligence, and virtue in general, in which the world could, in due time, safely and usefully do without it, as the grown man naturally puts away childish things? Whether slavery does not actually appear to a disinterested student of history, to be, accordingly, a providential exponent of God's wisdom, justice, and goodness, in carrying on the affairs of the disordered world during this its probationary state,—a wholesome ordinance, on the whole, for the punishing and restraining of vice, and the encouragement of virtue, to the more certain attainment of the ends of God's natural and moral providence? Whether it be not a reflection upon the character of God to conclude otherwise, just as it would be to conclude that sickness, pain, and death; or frosts, mildews, earthquakes, and volcanoes;

or the subjection of weak to powerful animals, or of the whole to man, are not naturally parts of God's comprehensive, righteous, benevolent, and, for aught we know, notwithstanding irregularities, the best possible administration of a disordered system ? Whether good men have really any need to concern themselves about these analogous evils, except to temper, moderate, and allay them, so far as possible, or otherwise endure them, with humility and submission, making them occasions of a higher moral discipline, till God shall remove them, if at all, in some way unknown to nature and experience, by removing the cause of them in the wickedness and imbecility of man ? Whether, however, on this subject as on all others that concern God's comprehensive government, we need not, in order to our better satisfaction, higher teachings than those of Natural Religion ?

III. Whether slavery is not also a positive institution of *Rerealed Religion* ? Whether, in view of the known character of mankind and manifold irregularities of human society, we should not, antecedently, expect to find instances and examples of such an institution, in any recorded history of the Divine government over the disordered world ? Whether, accordingly, the curse of Ham did not fall on him and his posterity both on account of his personal obliquities, and as the representative of a race naturally deriving from him, through his forbidden inter-

marriage with the previously wicked and accursed race of Cain, peculiar propensities, dangerous to themselves and to the other better races, and requiring their subjection and servitude to these other races, in reference to the wise and good ends which God had in view in repeopling the deluged earth? Whether the like of this does not appear on the whole face of Scripture, and particularly in the history of Melchisedek, Abraham, and other patriarchs of the race of Shem, who were God's representatives in those evil times, and bought, and held, and alienated slaves, in evident subserviency to the Divine will, as the constituted guardians of society? Whether it is not more evident in the Mosaic economy, where the buying and selling of slaves were not merely suffered, for a time, for the hardness of men's hearts, like divers irregularities which had crept in upon the original ordinances of God, and were inconsistent with them, but were required and regulated as necessary parts of the theocratic institution, without which his wonderful designs in separating the Jewish nation, and blessing the race of Shem, could not have been accomplished? Whether the same does not appear, with even greater impression, from the recognition and moral ordering of slavery in the precepts subsequently given to all the races by Christ and his Apostles, who never abrogated, annulled, or questioned the original institu-

tion, but specifically taught with what spirit and temper it should be carried on, by the respective parties, under a new and better dispensation, and till the end of it, when the curse of sin should be taken off, and all things be made new? Whether the facts of history, during the Gospel dispensation, are not natural exponents and illustrations of such a Divine plan, in which justice and mercy are harmonized in the providential care and government of the turbulent and malignant world, which otherwise, in its overmuch wickedness, would be likely to die before its time? Whether Christians in all periods, except some, in times of peculiar bewildering errors and excitements, and these mostly since the outbreaks of the modern illuminated and atheistical philosophies, have not justified the curse and stigma of the guilty Ham? Whether they have not confidently appealed to the historical execution of the curse upon his degraded race, in all times, as a remarkable proof of the justice, goodness, and veracity of God, and the credibility of his word;—and whether they have not sustained the institution of slavery as a conservative provision of God for the benefit of mankind in general? Whether any objections can lie against such an ordinance, which would not lie equally against the curse of toil and sweat in *slaving* the earth, which fell upon the whole world, for the sin of its representative progenitor; or the banishment

and mark of Cain ; or the subjection of the Jews to the surrounding nations, or of those nations to the Jews, by Divine appointment, when the ends of the Divine sovereignty so required ; or the subsequent dispersion of the Jews among all nations, and their disabilities and afflictions, as at present, for their rejection of the Messiah, and to diminish the political and social influence of their unbelief ; or the more familiar disadvantages of pauperism, incapacity, crime, in every period ; — all which, as righteous and merciful inflictions, are doubted by none who honestly admit the government of God or the authenticity of his word ? And whether these or other similar ordinances of God, in distinction from the abuses of them, in all periods, do not give a practical confirmation to the corresponding institution of slavery as of Divine appointment, and comfortably relieve all considerate and faithful minds in respect to this seeming irregularity in the providential ordering of the world ?

IV. Whether the holding of slaves, or the carrying on of a system of slavery by civil regulations, in accordance with a Divine plan, as understood by Natural and Revealed Religion, be inconsistent with any ideas or principles otherwise suggested or enjoined by the providence or word of God ? Whether it is reasonable to suppose, *a priori*, that God would, by any moral precepts, countervail positive institu-

tions of his formal government, or interfere with such institutions during their prescribed term of subsistence, or while the reasons for them naturally continue; and whether there is any evidence, in fact, of such practical inconsistency in the Divine legislation? In particular, whether the specific law of love, which requires us to do to others as we would they should do to us, has any bearing whatever upon such positive institutions, except in regard to the spirit and intention with which they should be carried on? Whether that law requires us to exchange or be willing to exchange places with each other, as masters and servants, parents and children, governors and subjects, ministers and people; or to abolish and annul these established orders and distinctions; or reduce all human beings and institutions to a level and equality; and whether that would not be out of all analogy to other departments of God's comprehensive system, and a manifest absurdity and impossibility? Whether the law of love does any thing more or less than to require of us, in all the different relations and offices which God appoints or sanctions, the exercise of a loving spirit, and to do to others what we would have them do to us, if God saw fit to place them in our sphere, and us in theirs? Whether slavery, that is, the buying and selling of men as property; or the having of a civil right, not to their souls (which is an absurdity, and belongs not to

any natural or scriptural idea of the institution); but to their services, for the mere support and care of them without wages; or the compulsory exercise of this right, for seven, fifty, or one hundred years, or during the continuance of certain distinct races upon the earth, as taught by Scripture, or, indefinitely, according to existing conditions and necessities of society, be not mere physical facts, and, *ex natura*, without moral character, except in reference to the intention with which they are performed? Whether, if slavery exists naturally and providentially, and, for aught we know, as necessarily to the ends of the Divine government as any other relation of superiority and inferiority, obedience to the law of love could, by any possibility, destroy it, during the continuance of the world in its present deranged and probationary state, or affect it otherwise than to make it more useful to all the parties, and subservient to the introduction of a higher state in which their rewards would be proportioned to their several talents and the use made of them during the appointed period of discipline and trial? Whether, consequently, any such interpretation of the law of love as would be theoretically inconsistent with slavery, or tend practically to its premature subversion by physical violence, as of legislation, or civil or servile war, or, if that were possible, by conventions, sermons, speeches, and resolutions, would not be a profanation tending equally

to the subversion of every other constituted relation of inequality among men, and the destruction of society ? Whether, in a word, the law of love forbids slave-holding, or, rather, slave-abusing ; slave laws, or tyrannical and oppressive laws ; the perpetuation and extension of slavery, as exigencies require, or the doing of this from avarice, lust, political ambition, or other forbidden principles of action ? Whether the exercise of slavery from righteous and benevolent motives, in reference to the ends of the Divine providence in the punishment and restraint of sin, the correction of ignorance, the support of imbecility, or the reform of the degraded and injurious, be not truly virtuous and commendable, and one of the methods by which good men become co-workers with God as benefactors of the world ? And otherwise, whether the reproaching of such good men, or of the institution which they represent, in distinction from its abuses, is not dishonorable to God, and subversive of his government ; and whether it has not actually contributed to aggravate many of the confusions and disorders which now exist ; and would not be likely, if continued, to precipitate destructive issues, both to church and state, from which deliverance might be impossible ?

V. Whether these interpretations of the law of love which are made by many wise and good men, in our times, as well as by bad men, in opposition to

slavery itself, in distinction from its abuses, as if it were essentially wicked and diabolical, inasmuch as they contravene laws of Nature and Scripture, and the judgment and practice of good men in general, in the past ages, are not fallacious, wherever their fallacy lies ? Whether the fallacy did not originate far back in subtle heresies of an early period of Christianity, affecting injuriously the ethics and theology of that and succeeding periods, but more remarkably developed, at present, in a wide-spread humanitarian philosophy which has insinuated itself, almost imperceptibly, but very considerably into the church of God ? Whether it does not consist mainly in a conceit and fiction of man's natural virtuousness, and his capacity to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness agreeably to his *natural* instincts, sentiments, ideas, and judgments, independently of Divine teachings and restraints, and without regeneration according to God's purpose and grace by Jesus Christ, as *supernaturally* revealed and declared to mankind in the holy Scriptures ? Whether this fallacy is not very plausible, flattering, inflating, and on that account, likely to be more popular and dangerous, as if mankind were not fallen, depraved, and morally incapable, as proved by Scripture and experience, and needed not punishment, restraint, and various severe and compulsory discipline in order to the reformation or even the existence of society, and some men, or bodies of men more than

others?—as if such control and discipline were mere clogs to man's otherwise noble and generous spirit, belonging to a rude and antiquated system of social life and education, which a better wisdom should explode;—as if the race, notwithstanding the literal Scripture and the dogmas of its severe apologists, were of Divine essence and godlike development, possessing an inherent principle of moral goodness, capable of elevation, progress, perfectibility, upon merely natural principles, and by congenial organizations or communities of social life affording the appropriate excitements of a free course, an even chance, and no checks upon the all-sufficient conscience and the generous heart from usurping and self-constituted authorities;—as if the law of love contemplated the greatest amount of happiness, as happiness is conceived by mere philosophy; that is, the multiplying of agreeable sensations,—and required us to make all our fellow-men equally happy in the enjoyment of equal privileges and immunities, upon the presumption, of course, of a common godlikeness;—or as if the conferring of freedom, or other means of happiness, equally upon all men, despite existing diversities of sex, nation, race, position, capacity, intelligence, experience, relations, would necessarily produce universal virtue? Whether, in other words, the interpreters of the illuminated modern schools do not reason from a merely speculative and imaginary

state of things, or a merely possible state, or that state which is yet future, and possible only, when Christ shall have dominion of the earth, and the curse of sin shall be taken off in "The Regeneration ;" and not from the actual state of depravity, ignorance, barbarism, madness, crime, and disorder which does and must exist till men are personally and individually converted through the Gospel ? Whether any form of social or political organization, even the wisest or freest, or a state of universal liberty, equality, fraternity, if at once set up to the fullest extent of a socialistic imagination, even with a Christian name and Christian ordinances, but *without Christian virtue*, would not presently run down into atheistic anarchy and confusion, and react to severer despotism and servitude, provoking then the execution of God's judicial vengeance upon mankind in general ? Whether there be not this additional reason to question these loose interpretations of the law of love — namely, that that remarkable class of persons who would carry out their speculative theories of human virtue, rights, and happiness, consistently and stoutly, in practice, if it were possible, to the subversion not only of slavery, but all other existing institutions of society, justify themselves by reference to such loose interpreters, and account them, because of their *new light*, to be the only true expounders of the will of God ? — that these

loose interpreters themselves, and others less excited, but drawn strangely into corresponding sympathies, declaratively accept Christ himself only as they imagine him to patronize their wild philosophy, and otherwise denounce his Gospel as the greatest curse that could be inflicted upon mankind, thus presumptuously measuring and limiting the Almighty by their imaginary wisdom ? Whether such things are not very alarming, and whether it is not the most alarming fact of all, that these conceits and falsehoods have become so popular, and powerful, and overbearing, that more considerate men, of better knowledge and more regulated sympathies, are too often afraid to speak, or suffer their friends to speak the truth ? And whether such better men should not have more confidence in truth, and assert it, and stand for the defence of it, in love, at all hazards, before it be too late to arrest the delirious movement of society which has been produced, and is likely, otherwise, to be accelerated by the specious sophistries of such designing or misguided men ?

VI. Whether there is any more force in objections against the institution of slavery itself, in distinction from its abuses, or any more substantial reason for abolishing it, or confining it within geographical limits, by violence or compromise, on the same account, than would exist in respect to domestic, civil, or ecclesiastical government ? Whether these all

are not equally ordinances of God, founded on similar principles of nature, growing out of similar necessities of the fallen world, and, in their different accidents and degrees, equally essential to the well-being of society? Whether they do not all belong, in essence and reality, to the same category, and stand or fall together? Whether the revolutionizing and subverting, or an unnatural confinement of any of them, are not likely to affect all the others, and not to be thought of, if at all, but in case of life or death, or by Christian men, but for the highest religious considerations? Whether slavery, notwithstanding the abuses of it which have for the most part existed, has not been on the whole, better for the world, in respect to righteousness, and even to what its objectors commonly regard as best—namely, physical happiness in general,—than if the most degraded part of it, the Africans, had not been permanently, or if the most enlightened and cultivated part of it, the Jews, when they renounced their God, had not been occasionally and temporarily enslaved? Or whether, if the Christian nations should be recreant to their trust, and become proud, rebellious, overreaching, aggressive, vindictive, cruel, on the one hand, or light-headed, fantastic, and revolutionary, on the other, God's benevolence might not require them to be scattered and sold, till, like the apostate Jews, whom he especially reduced to servitude,

they should glut the markets of the world, and there should be none to buy them? Whether the race of Ham is not in a more hopeful state, notwithstanding slavery, in respect to general enlightenment, Christianization, and ultimate deliverance from its bad conditions, than if it had been left by the other races to its unrestrained bad propensities? Whether the millions of slaves now in this country are not at a higher stage of material and moral advancement than any equal number of Africans in other parts of the world, or than they themselves would soon be if now set at liberty, on our own shores, under any influence that would naturally bear upon them in the present state of political and Christian virtue in the nation? And whether, as things now are, Christian men could better serve them, as a body, than to remedy, as far as possible, the evils of their condition, and qualify them, by the wholesome discipline which that condition warrants, and Christ enjoins, for such possible or probable unknown better state as the Divine providence may introduce, naturally or supernaturally, in a future period?

VII. Whether the Nebraska Bill, full of evils and fearful portents, though it be admitted, in respect to the political virtue and stability of the country, is of great consequence in regard to slavery itself, *aside from its actual or possible abuses?* Whether it calls for the great anxiety of good men otherwise than as

it is in violation of existing compromises — a breach of faith — and likely to disturb the balance of power between the free and slave-holding States ? Whether these matters, however grave and momentous, are sufficient, *independently of the lawfulness of slavery itself*, to draw out ministers of the Gospel, or the churches of Christ, *as such*, in formal resolutions or other overt measures in virtual opposition to the government of the country ? Whether in respect to the broken compromises, those dishonored measures themselves, when adopted, did not, to some extant, involve the surrender of a moral principle to a temporary political expediency, and were therefore *wrong* ? Whether they did not serve to arrest political evils for a time, but to increase and aggravate them in the issue, and were therefore *unwise* ? Whether, if continued, they would not have occasioned a dangerous local overgrowth of slaves, or a worse overflow and diffusion of freed or fugitive blacks among the free States ? Whether, according to experience, or by necessity, the protective legislation of the free States would not have reduced these unhappy people to a condition worse than servitude ? Whether the great dangers thence ensuing of civil or servile wars, and other evils not to be known or calculated beforehand, would not have resulted from such indiscreet intermeddling, by compromise, with God's natural laws and positive institutions ? Whether, therefore, the very selfishness and perfidiousness of

interested politicians in dissolving such injudicious compacts, if that wickedness be to the fullest extent admitted, might not enure to the ends of the Divine wisdom and goodness in the longer preservation and greater prosperity of the country; while they illustrate the greater guilt of the men who would prostitute the honor or prosperity of the nation to their inordinate ambition? And, in respect to the balance of power between the free and slave-holding States, as affected by the possible or probable extension of slavery, whether that is a subject which, at the worst, calls for the official action of ministers of Christ except by the preaching of righteousness, temperance, and judgment alike to all the excited parties of the country? Whether ministers or churches would be likely to honor Christianity, and awaken a healthy spirit on all sides of this difficult question, more by political action, or by inculcating upon the whole nation, after the manner of the early Christians, the principles and spirit of the Gospel? Whether points of etiquette or prerogative, when settled violently, are not likely to call for a speedy readjustment? Or whether, should the South have, for a time, preponderance of power, there is not yet land enough to be possessed at the North and West, where nature needs not, but rejects slavery, to turn the scales the other way? And whether nature does not, in general, best find an equilibrium, when let alone to her "masterly inactivity?"

VIII. Whether, if there be evidence, as above suggested, that slavery, aside from its abuses by bad men, or imperfect good men, is an ordinance of God, designed both in justice and mercy for the best, if not the only possible regulation of the world, in its present fallen and probationary state; or, if that be an open question; — if it be historically evident that slavery has fallen upon individuals, nations, or races for their crimes, and that it has been alleviated or removed, after certain stated periods, or when the sufferers have repented, and reformed their lives, and have become fitted for a more favorable condition; — if many of the wisest and best men, of all periods, have conscientiously practised it, as occasions occurred, with the approbation of God, and agreeably to his precepts; — if Christ and his Apostles treated it in the New Testament precisely as they did all other varieties of human government by inculcating the duties proper to the respective parties concerned; — if, though in itself an evil to the enslaved, and liable to great abuse from the bad passions of men, it is simply analogous, in these respects, to all other punitive or disciplinary ordinances of God whereby one man rules over another, and a less evil, on the whole, than a state of licentious and unrestrained ignorance and barbarism would be, and clearly subservient to the comparative elevation of the enslaved, and therefore, a relief and benefit to the disordered world in general; — if, moreover, it appear, that

American slavery, notwithstanding its inherent and accidental evils, has proved better to successive millions of Africans than any condition they could otherwise have enjoyed, as the state of things has been in the world at large; and if its reflex influence upon Africa itself has turned out to a considerable progress of light and virtue in that degraded part of the world; and if, in fine, nothing can be offset against these facts but occasional inconveniences and sufferings, however great, such as are unavoidable to any institutions administered by men, or nothing but philosophical hypotheses and theories which have no countenance from Scripture or experience, and serve only to bewilder and exasperate sensitive and shortsighted people, and thereby multiply dangerous political agitations, to no good purpose; — whether, in these premises, it be not unwise and hazardous for Christian men to denounce and oppose the institution itself, in distinction from its abuses, or give encouragement, directly or indirectly, to romantic and excited persons who would subvert it, even at the expense of a general revolution, before the time? Whether such Christian men would not really, though unconsciously, counteract the better intentions and established course of Providence, give the influence of their profession to destructive fallacies, put themselves virtually in the power of unprincipled and wanton coalitions, kindle fires of civil discord which they would find it impossible to extinguish,

prevent otherwise practicable and healthful reforms, and bring upon the nation and upon the slaves themselves evils and miseries greater than any which had awakened their sincere, but one-sided and misdirected sympathies? And whether these evils would not be greatly aggravated if such Christian men, in their public associations, or as corporate bodies acting as representatives of the churches of Christ, should give their combined support to unscriptural theories, and political excitements growing out of them, which naturally tend to produce so fearful a catastrophe?

IX. Whether — inquiring still further in the same direction — it be not, at least, highly probable that the constant play which has been practised, for some years past, upon the public sympathies, by a large class of persons who make a trade of philanthropy and live by it, whose benevolence is according to their mere instincts and sensibilities, on grounds purely speculative and notional, without regard to God's comprehensive government, as made known by Natural and Revealed Religion, and is always exclusively on one side, and that the side of crime, lawlessness and violence; and that the contemporaneous spread of a new and visionary philosophy and literature, which subjects Scripture to the interpretation of the intuitional reason and corresponding impulses of a romantic sensibility, and pleads for the boasted dignity and perfectibility of man, and

sets up his imaginary rights above his duties, and his happiness above his virtue; and that the zeal of selfish politicians in taking advantage of these occasions to favor their ambitious and unpatriotic designs, without concern for the ultimate bad consequences of their selfish and shortsighted schemes,—have produced a remarkable unhinging of the public mind in general, have greatly exaggerated, colored, and caricatured existing facts, and put them, for mere effect, out of their natural and true relations, and greatly confused both the common sense of the nation and its religious ideas, in respect to God's plans and purposes in moral government, producing a state of general confusion and distraction? Whether, therefore, ministers of the Gospel, and all other Christian men, should not take these epidemic mental disorders into very serious consideration, and treat them not empirically, by administering minute portions of the same poison that produced them, but scientifically, according to the methods of Scripture and experience, lest a worse stage of disease ensue, and both State and Church experience, unawares, the terrible and remediless collapse? Whether the body politic can afford to lose the legitimate practice of its natural and constituted physicians, in the time of its greatest perils? Whether, if they also fall, the fatal infection which they are appointed to *enslave* and *restrain*, will not have a free course, despite

the contrary good pleasure of a benignant Providence, and hurry all parties together to an untimely grave? Whether a merely speculative and notional right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness would then be of much account, while an actual and inexorable necessity of falsehood and passion was all the while compelling the nation to a miserable dissolution?

X. Whether, although the slave-holding States of the nation, or the nation itself of which they are but integral parts, be justified in respect to the institution of slavery as an ordinance of God, on the grounds above suggested, it is not out of question that the abuses of all varieties and forms of government are wrong, and bring down the judgments of God, to whom all governors are subject, upon such inexcusable offenders? Whether God has not put superiors, of every grade, under peculiar obligations to exercise their trust with kindness, leniency, forbearance, and charity, for the benefit of the subject, the abject, or the wicked whom he places, for the ends of his righteous government, under their control and discipline — that these obligations are next to those of piety; and that the guilt of selfish and oppressive superiors is proportioned to the magnitude and dignity of their office? Whether slavery, which has providentially found a settlement in this country, has not been wickedly abused in the slave-holding parts

of it, by injurious laws and customs, by many private and public wrongs not at all necessary to the institution itself, and fitted to turn off the minds of impulsive and shortsighted men from God's design in ordaining it, to the wickedness of those who have perverted it, or to the confounding of these distinctions, and the consequent dangerous agitations of society? Whether the withholding from slaves of what is just and equal and properly due to them, in their allotted spheres, for their relief, comfort, discipline, improvement, and salvation, has not become, to a great extent, characteristic, so that slavery, *as it is*, is subjecting the slaveholding States, and the nation in general, to the displeasure of God, and producing a dangerous reaction against the institution *as it ought to be?* Whether, at this day, the whole nation, in consequence of these facts — namely, the fact, on the one part, of abusing and perverting a wholesome and necessary ordinance of God, and the fact, on the other part, of assailing the ordinance itself, and attempting to break down violently, or politically, his constituted safeguards of society, and precipitating all parties into destructive revolutions, — is not brought to an alarming crisis which is likely to baffle the wisdom of its best men, in respect to its impending dangers? Whether the nation, in respect to slavery and all its other related institutions, is not signally failing in the peculiar probation

appointed to it by God,—namely, that of harmonizing justice and mercy in its political and social institutions, and giving to the world an example, heretofore unknown, of righteousness, temperance, and judgment, in the consistent exercise of power and enjoyment of freedom, agreeably to God's revealed principles and methods of moral government by Jesus Christ; so that, consequently, this last hope of the world, in respect to the success of human governments, is likely to be disappointed? Whether, in these critical and fearful circumstances, while the irreligious and immoral abuse of power and authority on the one hand, through cupidity and ambition, and the atheistical contempt of it on the other, through a false speculative philosophy, are bringing the whole nation into great danger of dissolution and ruin, it is not imperative upon all ministers of the Gospel, and other Christian men, without regard to geographical, sectional, or denominational distinctions, to humble themselves before the God of nations, in view of their respective errors and sins, and the common dangers of their country, with mutual charity, and united efforts to strengthen the things that remain, if, peradventure, his righteous judgment may be averted? Whether, if the North and the South, which he has created, are too deeply implicated in their respective fallacies and wrongs, and in a common danger, to be corrected and reclaimed, as is now too probable, and

these evils must proceed to their natural issue and catastrophe, it does not become the friends of God and of their country, of whatever parties, to clear themselves from all falsehood, prejudice, rashness, and vindictiveness, that the Divine judgments may be deferred, or the days of vengeance shortened, and that the reproach of these calamities may not lie at the door of the professed servants of Jesus Christ? Whether, if such good men fail in their probation, and commit themselves to the philosophical fallacies and errors, and the consequent violent and disorganizing measures which are projected upon the country by men of perverted intellects, distempered imaginations, and unbelieving hearts, the issue will not be worse for the nation than if it had never enjoyed the blessings of freedom, knowledge, and religion? Whether such are not the monitory lessons of Scripture in all its dispensations, and of history and experience from the beginning of the world; and whether this nation, or any illuminated part of it, possess such extraordinary wisdom or virtue, or are so held and secured in any Divine covenants, or are so necessary to the political and moral salvation of the other nations of the earth, as to constitute an exception to a general rule of providence?

XI. Whether a minister of the Gospel, who has learned that early impressions and common prejudices are not necessarily just, and is now honestly

convinced that slavery is not, of itself, a moral evil, or, by necessity, politically injurious, but is essentially an ordinance of the God of Nature and Revelation, for the ends of his general government; — one who would now hold slaves in his own right, or hire their service of their proper masters for missionary or other benevolent work among the heathen, if a natural necessity or convenience should require; and who could do this without conscientious scruples or misgivings, and with gratitude to God for such an opportunity of benefiting his degraded and suffering creatures; — one who would, however, more heartily emancipate them, if that were equally consistent with the general good, or, otherwise, would cheerfully prepare them, as far as possible, for a higher social and political condition; — one who looks for a general exalted state of liberty when Christ shall set up his kingdom over the earth, and doubts not that there are many of the same mind among the slave-holders of the world who are children of Abraham, and friends of God, — may not hope for the forgiveness and charity of his brethren, though he differ from them in this honest profession of his views? Whether he may not expect to be justified in his sincere though imperfect endeavor to allay the fever of the times, to induce a more impartial and generous study of the will of God, a more profound sense and acknowledgment of his righteous sovereignty, and

more earnest prayer for the setting up of his kingdom in the world ?

The writer leaves these questions to the consideration of ministers of the Gospel, the men whom it most concerns, as things now are, to be well versed and settled in the principles involved. He asks that they may be studiously and candidly examined, not in the lights of fiction and romance, but of Scripture and experience; not under the impulse of heated sensibilities, but of an enlightened conscience and a trusting heart; not in reference to the supposed present happiness of man, but the honor of his Maker, and the integrity of providential and moral government. He asks his good brethren to commend such study to other Christian and patriotic men, that, so far as possible, they may act advisedly, and with sound discretion, in view of the dangers of the times. And he asks the charity of all such virtuous persons who may read these pages, however he may fail to convince their judgment; for he would not be cut off from that hope of being better considered at a future time when the effects of recent agitations shall have passed away, or when greater and more dangerous excitements shall scare back the true friends of God and man from the precipice of revolution to their natural hiding-place in the first principles now temporarily forgotten. Of others he expects nothing, and asks nothing. He would not even *seem* to

desire any thing of perverse and dangerous men who would plunge their country into the abyss of an un-believing and disorganizing philosophy, and sacrifice the richest birthright that God ever gave to man, to a chimera. It is time for such men to understand that their noise and wrath can make no impression upon those whose feet are planted on the word of God.